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STATEMENT BY THE PRESIDENT OF THE SECURITY COUNCIL

At the 3746th meeting of the Security Council, held on 7 March 1997 in connection with the Council's consideration of the item entitled "The situation in Croatia", the President of the Security Council made the following statement on behalf of the Council:

"The Security Council has considered the report of the Secretary-General of 24 February 1997 (S/1997/148) on the United Nations Transitional Administration for Eastern Slavonia, Baranja and Western Sirmium (UNTAES) and recent developments in that region. It recalls the statement by its President of 31 January 1997 (S/PRST/1997/4) and reiterates its call on the parties to cooperate fully with UNTAES and the Transitional Administrator.

"The Security Council shares the observation contained in the report of the Secretary-General that, with the full cooperation of the parties, 13 April 1997 is a realistic and achievable date for the holding of free and fair elections in the region.

"The Security Council underlines that it is in the best interests of the members of the Serb community to collect their citizenship documents, to participate fully in those elections, and to take part in Croatian political life as equal citizens on the basis of the implementation of the rights and guarantees contained in the letter of 13 January 1997 from the Government of Croatia (S/1997/27, annex). The Council deplores disruptive activities by some elements of the Serb community in the region creating an atmosphere of political agitation and uncertainty. It calls upon all residents of the region to follow wise leadership, to stay in the region, and to take up their future as citizens of the Republic of Croatia.

"The Security Council stresses that the holding of the elections will also depend on the readiness of the Government of Croatia to meet all preconditions, including the issuance of documents, provision of data and timely completion of the technical arrangements required for certification. The Council acknowledges the encouraging progress the Government of Croatia is making in this respect. It is, however, concerned that implementation of these procedures has been uneven. The Council urges the Government of Croatia to redouble its efforts to ensure the completion of the necessary technical preparations for the holding of elections.

"The Security Council strongly urges the Croatian Government to issue, as a gesture towards reassuring the Serb community, formal public confimation of the oral guarantees made to UNTAES as specified by the Secretary-General in his letter of 21 January 1997 (S/1997/62) and to reaffirm its obligations as referred to in paragraphs 28 and 29 of the report of the Secretary-General. It also calls upon the Government of Croatia to apply its amnesty law fairly and consistently to all persons subject to its jurisdiction. The Council stresses that, to a large measure, the long-term success of peaceful reintegration will be determined by the commitment of the Government of Croatia to reconciliation and to ensuring that those Serbs who are currently resident in the region will enjoy equal rights as Croatian citizens.

"The Security Council shares the serious concern, as stated in the report of the Secretary-General, that no progress has been made concerning the future of displaced persons in the region and the establishment of equal treatment with respect to housing, access to reconstruction grants and loans and property compensation, in accordance with the Basic Agreement on the Region of Eastern Slavonia, Baranja and Western Sirmium (S/1995/951) and Croatian law. The Council reaffirms the right of all refugees and displaced persons to return to their homes of origin throughout the Republic of Croatia and to live there in conditions of security. It welcomes the proposal elaborated by UNTAES and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) concerning the return of displaced persons and urges the Government of Croatia to pursue discussions on that proposal without delay, to cooperate closely with UNTAES and UNHCR in implementation, and to make a clear and unambiguous public statement and undertake concrete actions confirming the equal rights of all displaced persons regardless of their ethnicity.

"The Security Council welcomes the commitment by the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and the Republic of Croatia to make progress in their bilateral relations, in particular with respect to the permanent demilitarization of the border region and the abolition of the visa regime, which would constitute a major contribution to local confidence-building and the stabilization of the region.

"The Security Council recalls its resolution 1079 (1996) of 15 November 1996 and expresses its intention to consider recommendations, to be submitted by the Secretary-General as soon as possible after the successful holding of elections, concerning the further United Nations presence consistent with the fulfilment of the Basic Agreement.

"The Security Council requests the Secretary-General to keep it regularly informed of the situation. It will remain actively seized of the matter."